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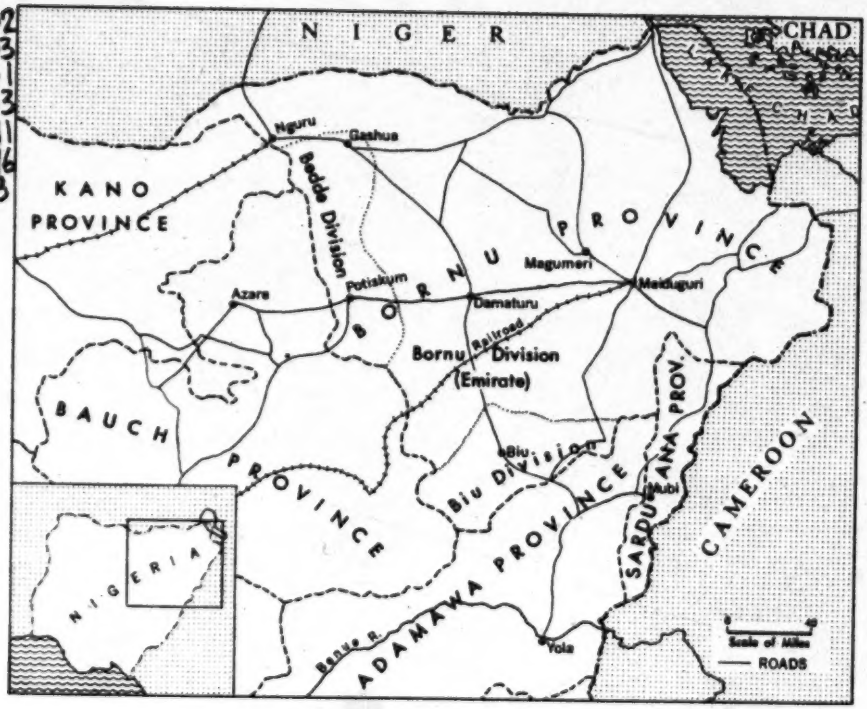

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1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

Geidam in the north, where another anthropologist, Abraham Rosman, and his wife were working. Discussions with Dr. and Mrs. Rosman helped all of us to see many of the unique features of Kanuri life that stemmed from our particular towns as against more general Kanuri patterns of behavior that were widespread throughout the society. We also became acutely aware of the kinds of variations that could occur across communities as they varied in size, ethnic composition, and quality of the political leadership. At the end of the first field trip, my wife and I spent three months in the capital city of Maiduguri looking at government reports and district notebooks, and acquainting ourselves with many of the special activities that characterize courtly life at the center of the emirate.

In 1964 and again in 1965 I returned to Bornu. On my previous visit the country had been a colonial holding of Great Britain, now it was part of the independent nation of Nigeria. My task in this second visit was to gather statistics on marriage and on divorce rates. But it also gave me a chance to see old friends, and catch up on what had been happening locally since my last visit seven years earlier. Some changes were readily apparent. A large number of deep wells were sunk all over the province, and these now provide enough water for a greatly expanded livestock population. Everywhere the cattle are healthier, fatter, and above all much more in evidence. They block roads and are seen herded in large numbers to and fro wherever one wanders over the countryside. Furthermore the people are less afflicted by parasites because the deep water is uncontaminated, as much of it was not during my first visit. There is now a large modern abattoir and a ground-nut oil refinery in the capital city, and in late 1964 the Nigerian railway finally pushed through to Maiduguri to connect the Bornu capital with Nigeria's national railway system. On the other hand, detailed questions about various traditional practices indicated that there have been few changes at the cultural and social level. At the political level where there were English District Officers and other officials of the regional government, now these posts are filled by Nigerians, generally from other parts of northern Nigeria. However it is for the most part correct to use the present tense in describing Bornu, and when this is not true I will attempt to mention the special circumstances that have brought on the changes.

Magumeri, our home for seventeen months in 1956 and 1957, sits on top of one of the ridges of Bornu, and there is a steep climb onto it from the motor road that travels along the bottom of the ridge for most of the year. During the rains, the road runs along the sandy top of the ridge, to keep clear of the large muddy areas formed at the ridge bottom. Magumeri includes approximately 2000 people about half of whom live in surrounding hamlets within the boundaries of the village area. It is a district capital and thus has a two-room primary school, a court house, and the large compound of the district head who administers twenty-one village areas, containing 50,000 people, living in an area of approximately 850 square miles. The village has a weekly market on Sunday, and is divided up into a number of wards under the village area head who is also the political leader of its surrounding hamlets and officially the political subordinate of the district head. Except for the fact that it has a somewhat lower proportion of non-Kanuri compared to most others, Magumeri is a "typical" Bornu village in terms of its size, occupational ranges of the population, and influences it receives from the capital and the world beyond the emirate. Indeed this is why I chose to spend most of my time

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throughout the emirate. Roads were built connecting the district capitals to Maiduguri, the major city of Bornu and to one another, and district capital markets came to be among the most active because of the increased population in the district capitals not producing their own goods.

In the economic sphere the colonial era sounded a death knell for the Saharan trade. A dribble of caravan trade still exists, but it was the express policy of the British to face Bornu around and turn its trade toward Nigeria and the Nigerian ports. Caravans were heavily taxed, and European trading companies were encouraged to move into Bornu and start circulating cash and cheap import goods. These few large English and French trading companies encouraged the appearance of a corps of Levantine traders who are ubiquitous in West Africa. They take credit from the large companies, giving it out again to large numbers of Africans who buy and sell for them. By the second world war ground-nuts were a well established cash crop, marketed through these companies although controlled by the government. When inflationary boom prices for ground-nuts hit Bornu after the war, the people were ready to take full advantage of it and there was a surge upwards of consumer buying, so that radios, bicycles, and many other industrial commodities became part of local life. On the other hand, judging by the surprise registered in the annual reports of the colonical officials, the government was a little stunned at first to know what to do with its increased revenues. However a host of new improvements began to be an accepted part of life in the public sector, just as new import items became common to the private sector. The most recent of such changes has already been mentioned in Chapter 1. After independence, the digging of deep wells increased the cattle population enormously and has provided a basis for further development in the area. This, then, is the Bornu background. It is a long and eventful one—and the people are proud of it. For an anthropologist, one of the most intriguing questions to ask is "why"—why has Bornu lasted so long in this area? Why has it adapted so well to modern times? It has absorbed Shehu Laminu's destruction of the Sefuwa dynasty, Rabeh's conquest, the colonial overlordship, and national independence in its calm stride. Its leaders and its people are remarkably stable—yet not enslaved by tradition. Indeed they strive to change and develop Bornu and their future is a bright and hopeful one. In the chapters to follow I hope to provide answers to these questions in order that we may ask them again after considering in more detail the quality of life in Bornu.

101 This study was carried out among the Kanuri people of Bornu Province, Northern Nigeria. The writer and his wife were in Nigeria from August, 1956 until October, 1957. Almost all of that time was spent in the town of Geidam, in the northern part of the province.

A. Geography

131 1. Major geographic features.

Bornu Province is in the northeastern corner of Nigeria. It is bounded to the north by what was then Niger Territory, French West Africa (now the independent Republic of the Niger). [133] To the east lie the marshy shores of Lake Chad and, south of the lake, Cameroons, trusteeship territory administered as part of Bornu Province. The Yobe River, largest of the rivers flowing through Bornu into Chad, forms the northern border of the [161] province for much of its length. Maiduguri, the provincial capital, population 56,740, lies roughly in the geographic center of the province. [491] The main road through the province runs from Jos through Maiduguri and then on to Fort Lamy in Chad. [496] The railroad barely penetrates into Bornu, running from Kano and ending in the northwest tip of Bornu at Nguru, the second largest town in the province.

133 Bornu is a huge sandy plain, contrasting sharply with the rugged country of the Bauchi Plateau, which rises steeply to the southwest. South of the plain is the hilly area of Biu which is in Bornu Province. The flat plain extends eastward,

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369 tionably larger than anything found in Bornu today. However,
162 as in all pre-industrial societies, the bulk of the population is engaged in agriculture and lives in the many small villages dotting the plain.

361 One can never travel far in Bornu without encountering a
[491] village. Major villages are linked to one another and to towns
[487] by laterite roads. Tiny villages are linked by a network of paths and tracks to one another. Surrounding each village
423 are the fields farmed by each family. Farm land can be had
425 by clearing the brush and making a plot ready for farming.
241 Since this is so easily done, land and its inheritance are not important determinants of the social structure. In theory,
[776] all land belongs to Allah and is in the hands of the Shehu of
[645] Bornu, the political and religious head of all Kanuri. The Shehu distributed large fiefs to Kanuri lords who gave the land to the village heads for distribution to individual villagers. In practice, any newcomer to a village has only to ask the village head for permission to farm and suitable land will be given to him which he must, of course, clear for planting. It naturally happens that those most recently arrived in a village will be given fields furthest from the houses, so that it is obvious that certain fields are more desirable than others. In a town of some size this becomes important. Distant fields may be up to three miles beyond the edge of town, and walking out and back each day to plant or to harvest is a demanding task.
241 Farm land, however, is never bought and sold. In the city this
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133 [137] [142] desert-like as one moves north from Geidam. The population to the north of Geidam continues to be Kanuri (or Manga), but its density declines rapidly as one moves directly north. Geidam lies on the Yobe River, usually referred to as the Komadugu Yobe River, a redundancy since komadugu means river in the Kanuri language. The Yobe is a slowly moving stream that empties into Lake Chad, approximately 100 miles east of Geidam. Many streams and rivers of the north flow for some months after the rains and then dry up completely. The Yobe, however, is large enough to continue to flow the year round. Before the rains it is reduced to a stream thirty or forty feet in width; after the rains the river reaches its flood crest, when it may extend over half a [505] mile in width. Though one could travel from Geidam to Lake Chad on the Yobe River, the Kanuri do not use the river for travel or [172] for commerce. Along the Yobe river, some twenty miles east of Geidam, lie the ruins of Birni Ngazargamo, the ancient capital of the Mais which was sacked by the Fulani. Hence Geidam is not [36] far from the old center of empire. Along the river, and still further on, along the shores of Lake Chad, are numerous villages and towns.

131 [134] The geographic location of Geidam, aside from the drier sandy nature of the land because of its northern location, is significant because of its situation in relation to Maiduguri, 131 the provincial capital, and to Nguru, the rail-head. Maiduguri, 633 in the center of the province (see Figure 2), is important both 491 because it is the administrative and commercial capital and be-

[GEIDAM]

633 cause it lies on the main highway connecting Ft. Lamy with Jos.
131 Nguru, in the northwestern corner of the province, is the second
491 largest city in Bornu, and is particularly important because it
[496] marks the end of the rail line extending from Lagos via Jos.
Geidam is strategically located so that it benefits from trade with both. (see Figure 1) Unpaved roads connect Geidam with Nguru, directly east, and with Maiduguri, to the southeast. It would be about 130 miles from Geidam to Maiduguri if one went by the shortest possible route. The road leads directly south from Geidam, however, and then directly east, and the total dis-
131 tance covered amounts to 170 miles. Though distances are great
49 and the condition of the roads is very poor, trade is dependent
438 on trucks which are the life-line of the country. Goods come into Geidam by truck from both Maiduguri and Nguru. They are then distributed throughout the countryside by merchants and tradesmen, using camels and donkeys to transport their goods.
[366] Since no roads at all lead north into Niger and the Kanuri villages north of Geidam, nor do roads lead east along the Yobe River to the villages and towns there, Geidam is an important regional center of trade and commerce. Its geographic location is therefore an important factor in determining the nature of the community.

B. The Physical Nature of the Community.

491 The road from Maiduguri joins that from Nguru a few miles
[366] west of the town (see Figure 3). The sole road connecting Gei-

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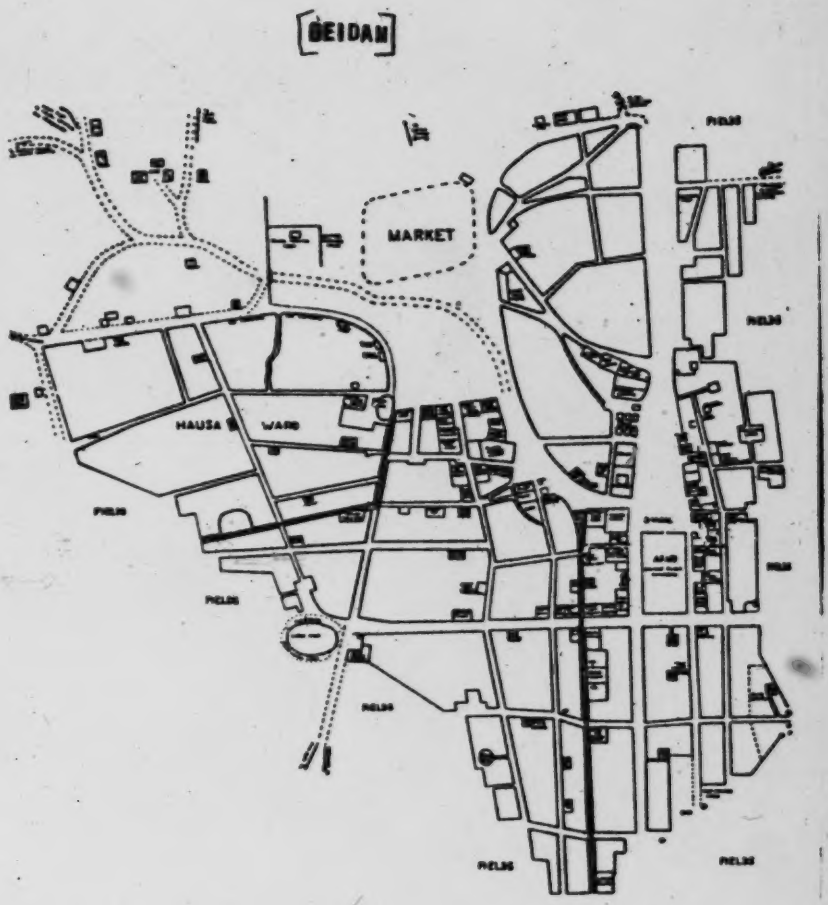

Figure 3 - Map of the town of Geidam.

[GEIDAM]

491 [366] dam with other towns first skirts the several canteens of the European trading companies as it enters the town, proceeds across a wide open area of a mile until it reaches the town 361 proper, and terminates in a parking area. The town itself has no wall, and no sharp boundary line marks its outer edges. In three directions, south, east, and north, the town is bounded by fields of millet, which begin immediately after the outlying compounds end. To the west of the town lies the river Yobe, but a strip of land about half a mile in width separates the [244] river from the edges of the town. In that area are to be found [134] garden plots, since the land along the river is particularly [366] fertile, and, closer to the town, stock yards, the slaughtering [232] area, and the cattle market, with its pens. Northwest of the town is the tiny adjoining village of Koldi.

361 648 Southwest of the town, and south of the cattle market, is the Government Reserve Area, a section of land reserved by the colonial administration in every sizeable town and city where Europeans are supposed to reside. It is physically set apart from the African town. In this case, the sole government building is the Touring Rest house, over a mile from the town, high on the banks overlooking the Yobe River. Another larger house, remnant of a time when an army unit was stationed here years ago, was rebuilt during the course of the year, and occupied by the Governor-General of Nigeria, Sir James Robertson, during a brief stay in Geidam. The Government Rest House is occupied by British administrative officials in their tours of inspection

463 be an element of traditional Kanuri culture. Most of these
467 specialists, craftsmen and tradesmen, are involved with the
441 market, an old Kanuri institution, but others are, and always
177 have been engaged in carrying on their trade outside of the
178 market. New types of craftsmen and tradesmen who are engaged in new sorts of activities which have been introduced into Kanuri culture as a result of contact with the Western world tend not to be organized compared to the older and more traditional groups in Kanuri society.

4. Local trade, and the market-place.

44 An attempt was made to tally the number of sellers on a
438 Geidam market day. Normally, the market is swarming with people at the height of market activity. This is particularly true in the dry season, in the months following the harvest.
[221] During October and November, when the harvest has been gathered
[491] and people can afford to buy things, and the roads are once again passable, the Geidam market reaches enormous proportions. The tally, however, was made over two market days in late August and early September. This is in the latter part of the rainy season, and the market is much smaller because of the difficulties in traveling at that time of the year, but it made it much easier to count the number of sellers present at one time. There were 1,477 sellers present in the market. People buying and the many others merely sitting around chatting or observing the scene were not included in the tally. There were prob-

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the Districts adjacent to the new capital to take turns bringing in to Maiduguri approximately 10 tons of millet per week in excess of the amount usually brought to market.(1) This was to ensure that the expanded urban population might have enough grain available for sale to meet its needs. In a similar but less spectacular manner each District headquarters became an expanded market town when the fief-holders came there to live bringing with them their large following and specialized needs. Thus inadvertently and concomitantly to the political reorganisation which the British carried on, an economic [565] readjustment was made. The consumptive needs of the large upper class which moved to Maiduguri, and the smaller enclaves of this same class which had moved out to the Districts had to be satisfied. That is to say, new nuclei of consumption were created in the Kanuri state [491] while others were abandoned or made smaller. Distributive channels of consumption and production developed in response to these changes in the settlement patterns of the non-productive upper class and roads were built connecting the District capital to Maiduguri and linking one District capital to another.

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In other aspects of economic activity, the British quite strenuously put down the slave trade and helped promote the growth of trade from Bornu towards the west (Kano) and south.(2) This soon brought the Bornu-Tripoli trade to a sad end, and Bornu's primary source of external trade came from its position in Nigeria and the west coast of Africa. At first, gum arabic and skins formed the major export

(1) The Annual Report for 1907 gives the figure as 800 ss (one ss is approximately equal to 25 lbs).

(2) An ex-slave trader in Bornu reported that his last raid had been conducted circa 1921-2. He gave up the trade because of the strong opposition from the European authorities which made the trade lucrative but dangerous.

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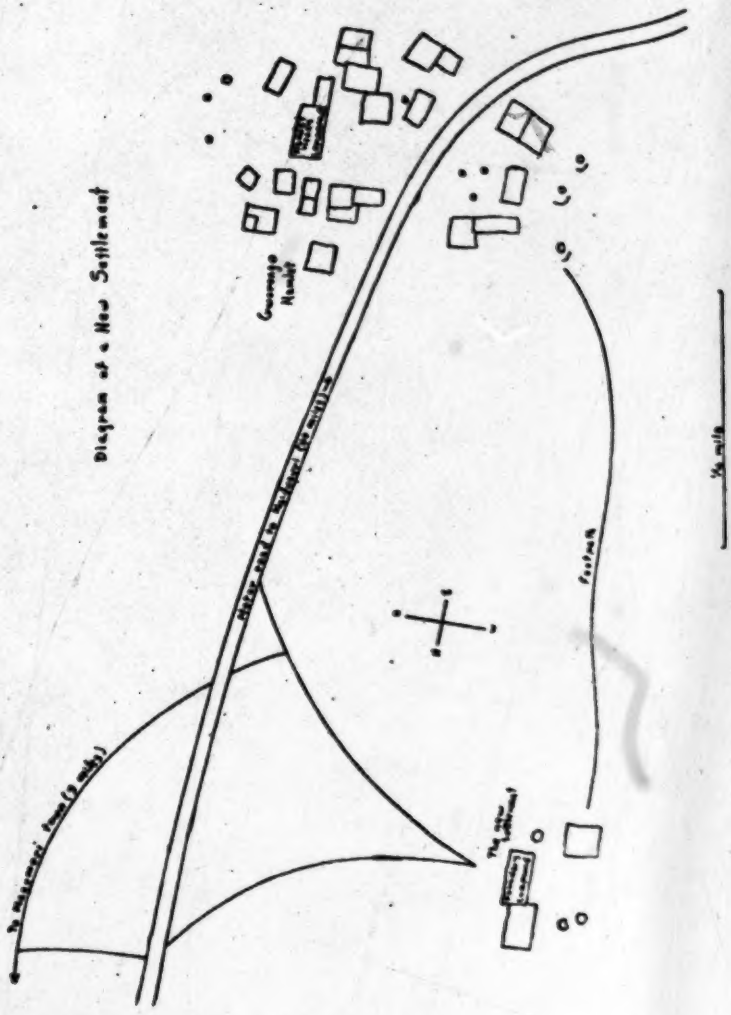
Diagram of a New Settlement
Gwoza Road
Bitter road to Gwoza (10 miles)
Footpath
¼ mile
To Mazamni town (3 miles)

634 The District organisation is roughly similar throughout the twenty-one such divisions in Borno Emirate. Each District shares the [368] name of its chief town. This town serves as the District capital and houses the DH and his followers, the District representatives of the N.A., a District court house for the Alkali (District judge), and a [491] Junior Primary School. Today most District capitals are connected to the Emirate capital by motor road. Formally, the DH is responsible for the administration of all village areas within the confines of his District.

634 A DH is formally appointed and installed by the Shehu in 64 consultation with his Council and the Colonial officials. Only high ranking men in the state are considered, and in every case but one, all present DH's are the sons of men who held the same rank. In the contemporary scene British ratification means that the choice must be weighted towards a literate English speaker wherever possible. The Shehu must feel that he is obtaining a loyal follower, and must benefit materially from the choice, by gifts in cash and kind from the would-be DH. (This latter action is illegal and unfortunately there is insufficient information for the writer to make a confident descriptive statement about gift giving by would-be office holders). Finally, the Shehu's Council must be won over or at least some of them, so that they will either support the aspirant or split on their opposition to him.

634 The DH's compound is supplied by the N.A. and is the most [644] impressive building in town. Each DH keeps a compound in Maiduguri, in the Shehuri (palace) ward of the city, with a residing Wakil (Chief follower) who appears at the Shehu's Court to represent his superior at the 634 palace. In the District, the DH maintains a large extended household 571 organization of followers and slaves. These live in contiguous and non-